the only one i never looked for

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by procrastinationfairy

Summary

Lois realizes she loves Conner and wants to be his stepmom. Clark and Conner try to decide how much to let her in.

Notes

I’ve been so pumped about the first part of this series (i want your complications too) that I decided I wanted more about Lois + Kon. So this is where we are. :) I'm on tumblr @spideylovesgwendy!

Rule #12 of Dating a Single Parent: Do *not* become their go-to babysitter. You're their partner, not their employee.

Caveat: If you never take care of their kids, you're probably a dick.

Lois probably broke that rule a little too much. She'd been dating Clark for over a year, and she adored Conner too. He was funny, bright, and absolutely adorable. Unfortunately, in their line of work, there were often times when one of them needed to run out unexpectedly. Lois was mostly unattached: She was free to run as she pleased. Clark was not. So if she already got her big story, and Clark suddenly needed a babysitter on a Thursday night, that was cool. What were sexy girlfriends for?

Besides, hanging with Conner was awesome.

"Do you have Mik-Jur?" she asked as she settled his bag in the guest room of her apartment. Lois still hadn't gotten a good answer about Conner's ugly teddy bear's name. Every time she asked, he only stared and (exasperatedly) repeated that Mik-Jur meant cool kid, *obviously*. She made the mistake of asking, "In what language?" once. Conner quickly replied Kryptonian. Ha, ha, very funny, kid.

"Yes," Conner said. He opened the side zipper and pulled out the scruffy green thing, giving him a big squeeze. "Mik-Jur doesn't like the sunshine. He says it's too yellow."

"Of course he does," Lois sighed. "Alright, kiddo. I need to type up my story, and you have homework. Let's work in the kitchen. Sound good?"

So they settled at the kitchen table, Conner on one side running through his multiplication tables, Lois clacking away at her keyboard. She had no idea when Clark was supposed to be back. He'd warned her that his story might keep him away overnight, which was why she was planning for Conner to sleepover. If she had to, she'd run Conner to school in the morning. But Lois worried. Conner was already upset about his dad going away. How would he feel if he woke up and his dad still wasn't there?

"I don't like school," he declared. "When I'm Superman, school won't exist."

"When you're Superman?" Lois repeated, holding back her snickers.

"Yeah," Conner continued blithely. "Dad says I'll probably have to be Superboy or something first, and maybe not even that if I don't get good grades, but I think I can be the best Superman ever. And no school."

Lois rolled her eyes and moved her laptop to peer at Conner's paper. "School is important, kiddo. Maybe not all parts are useful, but you learn a lot of good stuff. Wouldn't you miss your friends if you didn't have school?"

Conner shrugged, that hot air in his head deflating. "I don't got friends," he said. "Except for Mik-Jur. And sometimes Krypto. But he flies away a lot. Dad says he gets hot away from the North Pole."

Ah, yes. Krypto. Conner's newest pal: his imaginary dog. It was cute that he could come up with stories like that.

"Mik-Jur and Krypto are very good friends. What about me? Am I your friend?" Lois asked.

Conner pursed his lips. “You’re Dad’s girlfriend. That’s different,” he replied.

Lois wondered. “Can’t I be your friend too?”

Conner shrugged. “Roxy says her dad’s girlfriends are only nice until they go away.”

Oh, jeez. Lois did not sign up for this conversation. “I’m sure that’s… complicated. But that doesn’t mean they don’t like her,” she said. “Is Roxy your friend?”

“No. She’s my sister,” Conner replied.

Lois raised a brow.

“I want a sister, and Roxy wants a brother, so we decided to be brother and sister, and now she’s my sister, and I get to save her on the playground, and she throws rocks at the mean boys in my class. She’s really good at not getting caught. And then Dad can’t get mad at me for fighting,” Conner grinned, the little sneak.

“Pretty sure that’s not what your dad wants you to do,” Lois said.

Conner shrugged. He pushed his paper away. “I’m done! Can I go outside and yell for Krypto?”

Lois debated. Her neighbors would probably be annoyed at hearing a kid shriek, “Krypto! Krypto, come here, boy! Please?” for an hour, but kids need sunshine, right? And Conner was liable to pout if she didn’t give it a shot.

Hell, she could ask him to come in if someone complained.

“Sure,” she said. “Just let me know if Krypto wants to come inside. He’ll need to wipe his paws.”

“Okay!” Conner scampered off, barefooted in only a slightly too large t-shirt and grass-stained shorts. Lois’s balcony wasn’t very big, and with the curtains open, she saw Conner cup his hands around his mouth and start shouting.

He was really a good kid. She wished he knew how much she liked him. After all, if she stuck around, wasn’t she going to be—?

Huh. Mrs. Lois Lane-Kent. Wife and stepmom. That was… a real possibility now. The weight in her stomach rocked uneasily as she looked at her boyfriend’s son.

Clark wasn’t back in the morning, which sucked. Conner’s school started at 8:00 on the dot, and that meant Lois needed to get up at 6:30 to get both Conner and herself dressed, fed, and out the door by 7:30. Conner was the kind of kid to wake bright and early at 6:00 when the sun hit the right angle to peek through the thin white curtains of the guest room. By the time Lois woke up, he was playing on the floor of the living room, a plate of half-eaten frozen waffles and syrup left on the table.

“Conner, did you…? How did you heat these?” Lois picked up a waffle between two fingers, syrup dripping down the sides. There were two burnt lines down the center, and the edges were still frozen. She checked the counter. The toaster wasn’t out.

Conner looked up, his eyes almost gray in this lighting, wide and open. He stared at the waffle and blinked. He pursed his lips. “Microwave,” he said.

Lois opened her mouth. She shut it. “If my microwave did that, maybe I need a new one.”

“Maybe,” Conner shrugged. He ran his car over the floor again. Lois thought his hand might still be sticky. She hoped there was no syrup

on the carpet.

“Get up, kiddo. It’s time to get ready for school,” she said.

Conner looked up, all sharp edges. “I’m just gonna wait for Dad to come back. You can go to work,” he said, the words breezy and light.

Lois snorted. “Nice try. Up. Go wash your hands and get dressed.”

Conner pouted, but he stood up, leaving his cars on the floor, and marched off to the bathroom. Lois picked up the toys. She was not in the mood to boss him around about cleaning, especially when she had so much else to do.

Not willing to risk another mess with the frozen waffles and the microwave, she pulled out the toaster and popped a couple of pieces of bread in while she did her makeup. Conner returned a few minutes later, dressed and dragging his backpack.

“I really could wait for Dad,” Conner drawled.

Lois shook her head. “Ah-ah. You’re going to school, kiddo.”

Conner sighed. He glanced out the window. An alien in a purple spacesuit swung by. Superman followed after.

“Okay,” he agreed miserably. Lois grabbed him some breakfast on the go out of pity. The poor kid needed a pick-me-up.

Clark arrived at work around noon, brandishing a hot new story about the alien attack.

“What happened to the one you were covering last night?” Lois asked when he took his seat at the desk behind her. She stared at him through her mirror, the neat desktop mocking her own mess. She saw a picture of Conner, all fluffy curls and grin, arms wrapped around Clark’s neck. Her own face stared back at her from the other side of the desk.

“Fell apart. Caught onto this one though,” Clark said. He turned and smiled, one hand on her cheeks to pull her into a kiss.

“No canoodling during work hours!” Steve Lombard cried in a ridiculous imitation of Perry as he waltzed by, cradling his second cup of joe and a croissant from the break room. Interns darted around him.

“Canoodling makes us work better!” Lois shot back. She turned back to Clark and smiled. “Conner missed you, by the way. Do you let him use the microwave on his own?”

Clark raised a brow. “He’s eight, Lois. He’s old enough to use a microwave.”

“I think he broke mine. He heated some waffles, and they were—” Lois stopped talking. Would anyone believe the way her microwave had burnt the waffles? Especially like *that?* It sounded nuts. “Never mind. Want me to give your article a look over?”

“I think spellcheck can hold its own in a fight against you,” Clark said.

Ron Troupe snorted over the divider.

“Excuse you,” Lois said.

“He’s just being nice because he’s your boyfriend. Spellcheck would win,” Ron replied, eyes still glued to his computer screen, fingers flying.

“That’s— *Clark.”*

“I’m just being nice because I’m your boyfriend,” Clark admitted. Lois shed her cardigan and threw it over his head. He threw it back. The mirror flashed, and Lois saw Conner’s face again.

She loved him, she realized. Conner. She’d always thought he was funny, and he was a good kid. She’d been happy dating a single dad, more than she’d ever thought she could be. Part of that was Clark: Lois loved Clark, and she was willing to sign up for both of them. But that wasn’t all of it. Lois loved Conner—and if she didn’t love Clark, that wouldn’t change.

Was that what motherhood was like? If Lois asked most moms, she’d bet they’d say no. God knows she’d heard plenty about adoption not being *real* family from the extended family she no longer talked to. (Who knew that a woman dating a man with the most wonderful adoptive parents wouldn’t stand for insults to her future in-laws, Aunt Shelly?) Lois’s friend Daphne had grown up with divorced parents, and she always delineated the clear difference between her mom and dad from her stepmother and stepfather. “I don’t know if I could handle raising someone else’s kids,” she’d admitted on their last lunch date when she explained why she’d turned down a date with a woman at her office. “It just seems so complicated.”

Maybe it was. But Lois still loved Conner.

She pinched the bridge of her nose. She didn't even know Conner's history! That had always been a conversation for the future. She'd promised herself she wouldn't push, wouldn't ruin this. But when was the time to say she needed to know if she was going to be a part of their lives? When would she be more than just Conner's dad's girlfriend?

Would he ever even love her?

That shot something straight through Lois's heart she'd never expected.

"You okay, hon?" Clark asked. She hadn't heard him approach, but he sprawled his large hand across her forehead. His palms were strangely smooth for a farmer's son.

"I'm fine," she said, flashing a grin. "Just thinking about my story. Bet I can turn mine into Perry before you."

Clark looked skeptical, but he didn't argue. Lois loved that about him. Besides, she needed that competition to her mind back on work and not on how empty her desk seemed compared to his—even with three empty mugs and a muffin wrapper.

Part of Lois would always think of Lucy as a kid. Sure, Lucy was twenty-four, out of school, working a real job, but some part of Lois still saw her as seventeen and begging Lois to pay for an Uber after sneaking out, or nineteen and asking if it was *really* a big deal if she paid one of her friends to sneak wine into the dorm. Four years made a huge difference in their life experiences, and Lois played the role of big sister well.

Coming to Lucy for advice was pretty unfamiliar territory. Lois didn't like it, and she thrived on putting herself in uncomfortable—okay, she'd be honest— *dangerous* situations. But this sort of thing was more in Lucy's wheelhouse, and Lois didn't know who else to ask.

"Hey, girl," Lucy said when she picked up the phone. The line shuffled with static, which Lois was pretty sure meant Lois was on speaker, phone on her sister's chest. "What's up?"

"What's up with you? You sound comfy," Lois mused. She couldn't say much. She'd abandoned her bra the moment she'd walked into her

apartment, and her shorts were riding up as she sprawled across the leather couch, attempting to beat the heat.

“Uh, yeah, sort of,” Lucy said. “I’m painting my nails. So bear with me if my phone falls.”

“You think it’ll fall?”

“Yeah, my shirt’s kind of slick, and I’m laying— Doesn’t matter. Did you need something, Lo?” Lucy asked.

Lois smiled. “Yeah, actually. You know Clark—”

“Oh, *no,”* Lucy drawled dramatically. “I’ve never heard of *Clark*. You don’t mean that hunk of Kansas beefcake you’ve been dating. I’ve never heard of him *or* stalked his Facebook.”

“Shut up,” Lois scoffed.

“No way. Is everything good? No problems?” Lucy asked, suddenly serious.

Sometimes, Lois was reminded that her sister was an adult. She was old enough to talk about real, serious relationships and give advice. It had seemed crazy when Lois’s first instinct was to call her sister. But— “I love Conner.”

Lucy was silent for a moment. “What?”

“Clark’s son,” Lois continued. “Conner. I… I love him.”

“Right,” Lucy said. “That’s… good? If you’re going to be his stepmom, you should love him?”

“Yeah, but—” Lois stopped. She didn’t like to speak unless her words meant something, and she wasn’t sure how to make these mean anything.

“Okay, Lo, I’m not getting the problem here. You’ve been with Clark for a while. It figures that you’d start getting serious eventually. This is a *good* step, right?”

Lois closed her eyes. The whirr of her box fan didn’t quite drown out the traffic. “I don’t know how to be a stepmom,” she admitted. “I didn’t even want to be a mom. And this is…”

“Complicated. But yeah. You knew what you signed up for,” Lucy

said. "...Lo, if you're having second thoughts, that's okay. Clark's a nice guy, and Mom loves him, but none of that matters if you don't want to date him."

Lois shook her head. "No, I— I *do*. I love him, and I love Conner."

"Right. Then you need to think about where this is going. Like, you and *Clark* need to talk. I think you have questions I can't answer." Lucy's phone must have fallen, as her voice grew distant before a *thunk* echoed through the line. "Shit, sorry, hang on. I can't say I know much about being a stepmom, but I *do* know I see loads of families on flights. And those relationships sound complicated as hell. But that doesn't mean it isn't worth it. You think they're worth it."

"I do," Lois said, more surely now. She looked at her wall. She had a picture of her college friends from their trip to New Orleans, a picture from Lucy's graduation, Lois's diploma framed. If she moved a few around, she could make room for more. Did schools still do school pictures? How had Conner dressed for his? When they came in, would Clark offer one? What if they already had, and he hadn't?

"Then figure out boundaries, I guess. If Conner's mom's around, you need to know where you're going to be stepping on toes. And if she's not, then… you've seen those videos with adoption proposals? You might end up there. Or maybe neither. I don't know. Clark will have to tell you what he wants from you," Lucy said. She hissed. "Ooh, just messed that up. Is that any help? Because I have no idea what I'm saying."

Lois laughed. "Of course you don't. When's the last time you dated someone?"

"Uh. Dated?" Lucy asked.

"Don't say anymore, sweetie, I don't want to know," Lois said. "You know… if I *do* marry Clark, you're going to be an aunt."

"Sweet. Sounds good," Lucy said. "And… Mom and Dad will be grandparents."

Lois tightened her lips. She could already hear her dad asking when she'd give him *real* grandchildren. "If Dad can't be civil, he doesn't get to be near us," she said. "I'm not doing it. It was bad enough he tried to get me to break up with Clark because—"

"I know, I know. Relax. I was just—"

“I know,” Lois said. She looked at her phone. “My battery’s almost dead. I’m going to let you go.”

“Sure. Good luck with Clark. And Conner,” Lucy added. “Love you.”

“Love you too,” Lois replied. The line clicked, and Lois stared at her phone background. She’d snapped a picture of Clark and Conner at the zoo two months ago. She thought she’d like that background better.

“Text Perry and tell him this story will be late,” Lois said as she shoved her sandwich in her mouth. She was pretty sure what she said was actually gibberish between two slices of bread, but Clark seemed to get the point anyway. He grabbed her phone and dialed her passcode.

“Oh,” he said. “I like your background.”

Lois’s cheeks flushed. She turned to look at him. Clark’s stark blue eyes blinked behind his glasses, and everything about him softened. “Work time, Kent,” she said as she swallowed. “No distractions.”

No distractions. Not even her boyfriend and his kid.

Clark had another late-night interview, and he dropped Conner off at 8:00. “I’m sorry. I know this is last minute,” he said as he kissed Lois goodbye. “He’s in a grumpy mood. Something happened at school, but he won’t tell me what. Call me if anything goes wrong. I love you.”

“I love you too,” Lois said. “It’s fine. Conner and I will have fun! You get your story, Smallville.”

Conner scoffed and glowered. The frown looked off on his face. He wasn’t the grumpy type. Sure, he had a bit of a temper, but he’d reined that in since he’d first come to live with Clark. Whatever he was upset about must have been bad. Lois reached for him, and he jerked away.

“Okay,” Lois said as he stormed past her and flopped on the couch.

Clark frowned, glancing between his son and the hall.

“Go,” she ordered. “I’ve got this. You’re not alone, okay?”

Clark opened his mouth, then shut it. He leaned in once more. “I love you,” he repeated.

Lois smiled and soaked up the affection.

“Love you, Conner. Be good for Lois.”

“Bleh!” Conner shouted, sticking out his tongue.

Lois rolled her eyes. “You’re, what, nine now? Aren’t you a little old for that?”

Conner huffed and crossed his arms before flopping back on the couch.

Lois sighed and took a seat next to him. “Okay, kiddo. You don’t have to tell me what’s going on. But you do have to make a choice: We can put on a movie and watch it together. You can do your homework now so you don’t have to do it over the weekend with your dad. We can play. Or you can pout.”

Conner didn’t answer. He scowled a little harder.

“Pout it is. Your choice. I’ll be here,” she assured. She grabbed her laptop and finished up her last edits before filing her story for the morning edition before scrolling through Facebook. After fifteen minutes, Conner huffed again and flopped over, his head a few inches from her leg. “You want to talk now, buddy?”

“No,” Conner said firmly.

“Okay. You need anything?” Lois asked.

“Nope,” he said.

Lois kept scrolling. Another high school friend was having a baby—wait, baby number three. Damn.

Conner’s head was suddenly next to hers, staring at the screen. Lois turned to look at him and raised a brow. He jutted out his bottom lip and huffed. “What’s that?” he asked.

“Oh, a sonogram. An old friend of mine is having a baby,” she said.

“Oh.” Conner blinked and slumped back. “I got in trouble at school today.”

Lois pursed her lips. She closed her laptop and set it on the coffee table before leaning back. “Alright. What happened?”

“I was working with Reuben and Nicole,” Conner explained. He dropped his backpack on the floor, hands already moving emphatically. “And we were making a poster for Social Studies. And then Giles came up and stepped on our pictures and crumpled them up, and we’re not allowed to print out more. So I told on him, and Ms. Hendrix said we should have taken better care of our pictures and not left them out where he could walk on them. But he stepped on them on *purpose!* So I told her that wasn’t fair, and she said I was backtalking and made me sit in the hall.”

Lois pursed her lips and narrowed her eyes. “Has Giles done anything to you before?” she asked.

Conner shrugged. “Not me, really. But he used to put fake spiders in Roxy’s hair,” he said. “And, I, uh—” He faltered and looked up at the ceiling, adjusting his glasses. “I don’t know. He just decided he didn’t like me all of a sudden.”

“You haven’t done anything to start this?” Lois asked, raising a brow. “Like trying to defend Roxy?”

“I told Ms. Hendrix about Roxy ‘cause she wouldn’t, but she just said Roxy is good, so… well, if she wouldn’t do anything—” Conner huffed and crossed her arms over his chest, brow furrowed. He didn’t look like Clark with that intense, vengeful expression. Lois reached to stroke his cheek. “Okay. If I *did* do something, it was something *small* and he couldn’t *prove* it, so—”

Lois snorted. She had a feeling she was supposed to get onto him, but, well— “You saw something unfair and did your best to fix it,” she said. “I think it’s nice that you’re looking out for others and standing up for yourself. But the bad news is sometimes people in power don’t care, kiddo.”

Conner deflated. He started to pull away.

“I’ll talk to your dad and see if he can talk to your school,” she said. “We’re going to make a stink for you and your friends. If they don’t resolve it, they’ll have to remember when we run a story on the effects of bullying and how that starts *young.* I’m not going to tell you not to stick up for people. In the moment, you do what you have to do. But you should talk to your dad or me. Or someone. Sometimes, you need to let the grown-ups handle it.”

“Grown-ups suck,” Conner spat. He flopped back and threw his feet onto the coffee table. “No one ever listens to me.”

“Oh, what am I? Chopped liver?” Lois scoffed.

Conner shrugged. “Dad’s girlfriend,” he repeated. The knife dug in a little bit deeper.

“I’d like you whether I was dating your dad or not,” Lois said in lieu of anything actually on her mind. She resisted the urge to play with Conner’s curls or anything that would overstep her bounds. She wasn’t Conner’s mom. She wasn’t even his stepmom yet. But damn, Lois thought she was going to be.

When Lois met Clark for lunch the next Monday outside the best burrito-and-tamale stand in Metropolis, she laid down her thoughts. “We need to talk about Conner,” she said.

Clark dabbed his face carefully with his napkin, hot sauce from his burrito dripping over his lips. “What about Conner?” he asked, brow furrowed. The bench they shared was small, so they were pressed up together, which made eating a little difficult.

“I…” Lois faltered. She never faltered. “I think we need to talk about when I’m going to— Look, Clark, we’ve been together for over a year. And I want to know more about him. Before he came to live with you,” she amended.

Clark pursed his lips, which was pretty much Smallville for, “We’re not going to talk about it.” “I get what you mean,” he said. “But—”

“When do you plan on telling me?” Lois interrupted. She wasn’t in the mood for excuses.

Clark stayed silent.

Lois’s stomach sunk. “If you want me to marry you, I need to know at some point,” she said.

Clark didn’t move. Lois, suddenly, felt horribly humiliated. Clark had never mentioned marriage. Had she built this all up in her head? What was the timeline for marriage with single dads? Was she rushing things?

“Marriage?” Clark said finally.

“Never mind.” Lois was going to shove everything back in the box. Including her lunch. Thank god they’d just grabbed something to go.

“I’m going back to the office. I’ll see you later.”

“Lois—” Clark said. She didn’t turn back. She didn’t cry. Lois wasn’t that kind of woman.

Lois
Do you think I’m the kind of person someone would marry?

Lucy
Woooow, loaded question alert.

Lucy
Why not? You’re not ugly.

Lucy
What’s wrong?

Lois
That’s not what I meant.

Lucy
Is this about Clark? What did he say? Do we hate him? That d-bag.

Lois
No.

Lois
Never mind, okay? I’ll see you.

Lucy
If he doesn’t want to marry you, he sucks. And you can tell him I said that.

Lucy
There are other people, Lois.

Lois
No other Clark. Or Conner.

Lucy
He’s really missing out.

Lois
Okay.

Cat Grant wasn't Lois's favorite person in the world, but Lois respected her writing skills. Plus she made meetings entertaining.

She was also someone who appreciated straightforward communication and lacked the need to spare Lois's feelings with insight into the single-parent dating realm. So Lois cornered her in the break room that afternoon and explained her problems.

"Speaking as a mom," Cat said as she sipped on her tea, "I prefer to date single dads. Honestly, if you hadn't snatched Clark up, I'd be dating him."

"You seem so sure," Lois shot back.

Cat shrugged, her loose curls bouncing over her shoulders. "I'm hot. And Clark's not blind. Plus, he's sweet. Who wouldn't like Clark?" Her lips ghosted over a smile. "But he likes you, and that's his choice. It's a shame."

"Why do you like dating single dads?" Lois asked, eager to change the subject.

"Because they get it," Cat replied. "There are obligations. Things aren't as easy when you're dating without any attachments. And your first priority always has to be your child. And when you're divorced, there's the ex factor… I've dated single men, and some of them don't like my son. Which is a dealbreaker. If they don't like Adam, they don't like me."

Lois bit her lip and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "I like Conner," she said. Her heart thumped, thinking of that picture on Clark's desk all over again. Of course *Clark* loved him, kept him pride and center. He was his father. And Lois…

Cat eyed her. "Good. Because they're a package deal," she said. "You don't get to love one without loving the other. Especially that young."

"But Clark won't even *talk* about Conner. Not like…" Lois waved her hand. "He's asked me to watch him overnight a few times, but if it's about… Conner's past, or…" *Marriage,* her mind filled in, and her cheeks flushed all over again.

"He's a parent. He's going to be protective over anything sensitive like that. And you can be intense, Lane. Maybe he's not sure why you're after that information." Cat shrugged and adjusted her collar.

“After a year?” Lois asked. “I asked him questions before we started dating, but that hasn’t— I want to know because I *love* them. I can’t be part of—” And, *ugh,* this was the sappy part she was bad at. Why did seeking advice have to suck so bad?

Cat frowned, brows knit together. “You love them,” she repeated.

Lois groaned and buried her head, nodding into her hands.

“Be clear,” Cat advised. “Tell Clark you’re with him for the long haul. Hate to tell you, Lane, but the hardest part of relationships is communication.”

“I hate communication,” Lois groaned.

“Because you have no soul. But I do, and so I *won’t* tell you that if things don’t work out for you and that hunk, I’m snatching him up,” Cat said.

“You— just—” Lois sat up, but Cat was already walking out. Whatever. She didn’t have time for that.

When she returned to her desk, Clark was back from lunch or his story or whatever he’d been doing since they’d departed. His face was flushed.

“Did you take a jog on your way back, Smallville?” Lois asked.

Clark cleared his throat. “I— No— About lunch,” he said.

“Don’t mention it,” Lois snapped.

“I didn’t think we were talking marriage yet,” he said. “Lois, if we are —”

“Don’t mention it.”

Clark stayed silent for only half a second, which was impressive, considering the glower Lois had leveled him with. “We have a lot to talk about before we get married,” he said.

Lois faltered. “I know,” she said. “And I want to… I want to be there. Together.”

Clark’s lips flickered into a smile. “Later,” he promised. “Perry probably doesn’t want a melodrama on the work floor.”

“Damn right,” Perry groused as he walked by. “Lane, *please* stop breaking spellcheck.”

“No can-do,” Lois replied. “It’s a passion.” But she opened up the article he’d sent back and started on her corrections anyway.

Maybe Lois *was* breaking Rule #12 too much. When Clark dropped Conner off again, she hadn’t expected anything other than the usual.

But they did live in a world of Supermen and gods. Usual wasn’t a given.

Metropolis and its suburbs had been in a state of emergency for sixteen hours. Lois’s building had shaken a little, but they were luckily in a part of the city that was relatively unaffected. The power was still on, and she’d turned on GBS for updates. Conner had taken a seat quietly on the couch, no protest. Lois wasn’t sure if the interest in the news was something he’d picked up from his dad or just a natural interest, but they didn’t talk about it. They listened to the updates on Superman’s battle with Metallo and the strange upgrade he’d received.

Clark wasn’t answering his phone either. Lois hadn’t told Conner because she hadn’t wanted to worry him, but she’d taken far too many “bathroom breaks” to try and get in touch with her boyfriend, who had been on Eighteenth Street, where the battle had started.

Clark couldn’t be dead. He was hurt, maybe, knocked out, or taking shelter. But he wasn’t dead.

That couldn't happen. And still, Lois’s mind raced with possibilities. If something *did* happen to Clark, where would Conner go? Clark’s parents might be too old to care for another child. There was always the possibility that Conner would go back to his other parent, but Clark had full custody. Lois knew enough to know *that.* He’d come to live with his father for a reason.

Lois would take care of him if she could, but they’d never made anything clear. Did Clark even have a will?

She sniffed once.

“Lois?” Conner called.

Lois dabbed at her eyes with a bit of toilet paper before walking back to the living room. “I’m here, kiddo,” she promised. She turned back

to the screen. Some cameras had approached the scene. Metallo shot a metal beam. It pierced Superman's stomach. He grimaced, face green. Lois's heart clenched. Something was horrifying about seeing Superman in pain.

Conner gasped. She took his hand and squeezed it. He leaned into her side. "He has to be okay," he whispered.

"He will be," Lois replied. She nuzzled her nose against his curls and wrapped her arm around him. "He's Superman. He'll figure this out. Just give him a chance."

Conner's brow furrowed deeper, and he squeezed her hand almost tight enough to hurt—okay, definitely tight enough to hurt. The kid was strong. She tried to wiggle her hand again, but he didn't let go. On the screen, Superman sunk to his knees, and blood dribbled down his gut. Conner swallowed. "Dad!" he shrieked suddenly.

Lois frowned. "What? Where's your dad?" she asked, peering closer at the screen. "Did you see him?"

Conner blinked once before turning to look at Lois, face oddly blank and pale. "No," he said after a moment, swallowing again. "I just… I just want Dad," he finished, quiet and defeated. Lois had never seen him like this. She hated it.

The lights went out after that.

Lois and Conner sat together in the dark for another four hours. When the lights came back on, she plugged her phone in. It was nearly dead, and she'd tried to conserve power by turning it off, in case they needed to evacuate. As soon as the screen lit up, Lois checked her texts. Nothing from Clark. Her stomach sunk. A few from friends and coworkers.

Jimmy
You okay? You're normally the first one on the scene.

Lucy
I saw the news. Stay safe, Lois!

Perry
Stay out of this one. It's too dangerous. Get the story after.

Daphne
Just checking that you're okay! Let me know.

Lois exhaled slowly. She looked back at Conner, still seated on the couch with his arms latched around his legs. “I think maybe we should get some rest,” she suggested. “We’ll try calling your grandma and grandpa in the morning.”

“No,” Conner insisted. “I’m staying up until Dad comes home.”

“Conner,” Lois started. But she heard something on the balcony. Through the off-white curtains, a shadowy figure crumbled to the ground, his cape fumbling behind him. She started to move, but Conner got there first, throwing the curtains aside, then the balcony doors. Superman sprawled across the concrete, pallor still tinged green.

Lois hadn’t seen Superman since the last time she’d interviewed him. Two months ago? It’d been a while. And they certainly weren’t as close as when he’d first arrived on the scene. He’d moved onto the big leagues, founded the big leagues. Lois got it, and she still got her stories. She didn’t understand why he’d come to her place.

Until Conner dropped to his knees and cried, “Dad!” and everything made sense.

Lois had started to drag Superman— *Clark* —inside, but Conner had grabbed him and carried him instead. She’d wanted to laugh at that, but it didn’t quite come out. Between the two of them, they settled Clark on the sofa with a sheet underneath to catch any blood.

“Dad says he just needs sunshine to make kryptonite stop hurting,” Conner said. “Unless it’s still inside him.”

Lois was *not* a field medic, but she’d poked at his wounds until she was sure there were no shards stuck inside. They left the windows open but curtains closed, as they needed the privacy even as they needed the sunshine. Clark woke eight hours after he’d arrived, and the first thing Lois did was throw her arms around his neck.

“Don’t ever do that to me again,” she pleaded. *“Clark.”*

“Lois,” he’d rasped. “I—”

“I have *so* many questions,” she said. “But that can wait. Water. Conner, can you—?”

“Got it, Lois!” the kid yelled, rushing back to the living room with a

cup of water in hand. Having a kid with superpowers was oddly helpful.

“Thanks,” Clark said. He took the cup and started to sit up. “I’m sorry. I was going to tell you—”

“Well, I’d hope so,” Lois replied as she crossed her arms. “Of all the secrets, Smallville, this isn’t what I thought—”

Clark smiled sheepishly. Even without his glasses, he still had something of a bashful Kansas way. His hair looked nice a little loose, like Superman. Clark *was* Superman. Funny how now that she knew that, Lois couldn’t see anyone but Clark. “It’s hard. To explain, I mean. And I didn’t want to overwhelm you, but my secrets are all *together*. I can’t tell you one without telling you the other. Like Conner—”

Lois leaned forward and brushed the curl off of Clark’s forehead.

“Conner was made by Cadmus,” Clark confessed. “The cloning story you ran— *he* was the project.”

Lois’s blood ran cold. She looked at their kid, sitting on the carpet with all his attention focused on his dad, all that fear he’d felt for the past few hours. He was only nine, so young and small, so full of righteous fury and indignation, full of *life* , bubbly and funny and unapologetically entertaining. He was a child.

And someone had made him in a lab. They’d made a clone of Superman in a lab. Nothing sounded good about that.

“I had some info that led me to find out,” Clark explained, reaching to stroke Conner’s hair. “And I intervened before they’d managed to— Anyway. I couldn’t do anything but take him home. I called some friends to make some papers, and as far as anyone’s aware, Conner’s just my son.”

“So his other parent… doesn’t exist,” Lois said.

Clark pursed his lips. “He… exists. But hopefully, he’ll never know about Conner.”

“I don’t need another dad anyway. One’s enough,” Conner said.

“How ‘bout a mom?” Clark asked suddenly.

Lois flushed. Conner glanced at her and scrunched his nose. “Uh…”

“If your dad and I got married, I’d be your stepmom,” she explained. “Is that… okay?”

Conner hesitated. Lois loved him, so very much, and she loved Clark beside her, grasping her hand like he didn’t want to let go. Lois had never imagined this life for herself. She’d never wanted anything more.

“I guess that’s fine,” Conner said. His cheeks were pink now, and he looked unsure. Clark pulled them both into a hug.

“I love you both,” he said.

“We love you too,” Lois agreed. She squeezed Conner, trying to convey everything she couldn’t say yet. Maybe he wasn’t to where he’d want her around. But she was going to try. “Don’t we, kiddo?”

“Yeah,” Conner said, a cheeky grin on his lips. “But I love Krypto more.”

Lois rolled her eyes. “Krypto isn’t real,” she said.

Clark faltered. “Oh, uh. No. Krypto *is* real,” he admitted. “He’s our… Kryptonian dog. But he wasn’t supposed to come when Conner was with you because…”

Lois leaned back. “Oh my god.”

“Krypto is the best boy,” Conner said seriously.

“Smallville.”

“Surprise?”

Lois rolled her eyes. “You’re going to have to help me keep your dad in line. I don’t like secrets. Think we can wiggle them out of him?” she asked Conner, very serious.

“Yeah!” he agreed with a laugh. His laugh was beautiful. Everything about him was perfect.

And Lois had never realized how much she’d wanted a son before—how much she’d wanted *Conner*.

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